Progress Report

1. Revision/Creation of Mission Statement and Learning Goals

Since the Memorandum of Agreement was signed in May 2003, the Curriculum Committee has met regularly (about twice a year) to discuss issues in the Catholic Studies curriculum. During academic year 2003-2004, the committee worked on a revised mission statement and on a new learning goals statement. These documents were then discussed with the Catholic Studies faculty at several quarterly meetings, revised, and finally approved.

These two documents are part of the packet distributed now at each quarterly faculty meeting to communicate to new comers what the program is about. The mission statement is printed in program brochures distributed to prospective students at University and Program Open Houses. The learning goals statement became the basis for the program’s first (partial) assessment exercise in 2005.

2. Evaluation of Curriculum

The program has evolved significantly in the past few years. Three years ago there was one student majoring in Catholic Studies at DePaul University. There are now twelve majors and several minors. The CTH director advises all of these students, and she teaches the capstone course as an independent study.

Since the MOA was signed a great effort has been expended in gathering together faculty who would be interested in teaching in this program. Catholic Studies has no faculty of its own: but some thirty full-time professors from fifteen departments and many adjuncts now teach courses in Catholic Studies. The Director schedules two courses a quarter; all other CTH courses are cross-listed with, and controlled by academic departments. The Catholic Studies faculty learn about and discuss the teaching goals of the program at quarterly meetings they are invited to attend; if they do not attend the meetings, the handouts are sent to them via inter-office mail.

The five CTH core courses are clearly delineated on the Catholic Studies website, the brochures we distribute, and other informational materials posted on bulletin boards in the Student Center and in the program’s office area. “Introduction to Catholicism” is now
scheduled once each quarter, and since the class always fills quickly, we are hoping to teach it four or five times next academic year. CTH 201 will be taught in spring 2006 for the first time in several years. CTH 205 and 206 are taught each once a year; CTH 209 is taught on average every other year. To fit the core courses into their schedules, some students have had to ask faculty for independent studies.

The Catholic Studies website has been redesigned and then updated several times since the MOA was signed. The list of courses taught in the program is one of the pages on the website. This list includes several new courses that have been added to the curriculum; some course descriptions and numbers have evolved in conjunction with curricular changes occurring in such academic departments as ART, PHL, and REL. Some courses that were never taught have been removed from the list. The website also includes the schedule of courses each quarter, along with course syllabi submitted by the instructors.

Scheduling enough advanced courses in the major remains difficult. For now we have removed all courses taught at the Catholic Theological Union, as CTU has moved to a semester calendar. A variety of new three hundred-level classes have been taught in the past two years in conjunction with English, History, Religious Studies, Philosophy, Anthropology, and Political Science, usually as “themes in…” courses.

Discussions about possible concentrations within the CTH major have occurred in particular around the themes of Catholic Social teaching, Vincentian Studies, and Music and Liturgy. One ongoing difficulty that Catholic Studies has encountered in developing its curriculum and setting up these concentrations is that the program has no faculty of its own, and is therefore dependent on the good will of departments to hire faculty in these areas, of department chairs to assign faculty to teach classes in these areas, and of faculty to commit to teaching in these areas. None of this happens easily.

3. Governance
The faculty group meets once a quarter for about an hour and a half. The purpose of this meeting is the exchange of information. On occasion, staff who assist the program in various ways are invited to attend as well. In addition, faculty are invited to several lunches and dinners each year, along with other opportunities for them to get better acquainted with one another. Much of the contact among the faculty happens via email messages sent to the entire group.

The curriculum committee has been rejuvenated. On average this group meets twice a year. This committee has the power to make all formal curricular decisions for the program. A subcommittee of this group serves as the assessment committee for the program.

An advisory board was created three years ago to plan co-curricular events, but in effect that group has had difficulty meeting. It has been easier for the program director to meet separately with smaller groups of faculty interested in planning different kinds of events.
Some times outside speakers have been invited; other times the faculty of the university have been the main speakers.

This system has been quite fruitful. In the past three years the Catholic Studies program has been the main organizer of the following series of panels and events: “Contested Allegiances” (four evenings in autumn 2003); “Women and the Word” (museum exhibit and three evenings in winter 2004); “Anne Burke at DePaul (one evening, spring 2004); “Talk the Vote” (five evenings in autumn 2004); “Jerusalem quarter” (three evenings in winter 2005); Papal panels (two evenings in spring 2005); “Iraq, Compassion, and Communion” (one evening in autumn 2005). We are currently planning a series for 2006-2007 on Christian martyrdom.

4) Assessment of Student Learning
After spending a year determining the program’s learning goals and learning about what kinds of things would qualify as valid assessment exercises for the major, in 2004-2005 the Catholic Studies program attempted its first assessment exercise ever.

During winter 2005 a subcommittee of the curriculum committee met twice with small groups of majors to discuss their experience of the first learning goal: “Mastery of Content. Catholic Studies is an interdisciplinary program that explores the depth and breadth of Roman Catholic life, history, culture, and thought throughout the world.” That was a useful project, as we heard many of the students convey a certain kind of frustration about the Catholic content of certain cross-listed courses. When it came time to review examples of the students’ written work and assess the learning goal more objectively, however, the committee was met with a dearth of papers to review. Only one student submitted a paper. As a result the assessment exercise was aborted last year; we hope to complete it this year.

5) Catholic Studies Visibility
A great deal of effort has been expended to fulfil this action of the MOA. The website has been entirely redone and updated several times. Bulletin boards have been erected, and brochures made and distributed. The list of CTH courses each quarter is posted on the bulletin boards and sent to University Ministry. Co-curricular events are advertised in flyers we post around the university and via email; on Townsquare and the university calendar; in the Catholic student Sunday bulletin and in weekly online bulletins. Occasionally we advertise events in the archdiocesan newspaper. We are looking to advertise next year’s series on martyrdom in the national Catholic press.

The third annual Catholic Studies Open House will be held later this month: this event brings together Catholic Studies faculty and students, prospective majors, alumni, and representatives of the various Catholic entities on campus (student groups in University Ministry; Office of Mission and Values; parish of St. Vincent DePaul; Perboyre Mission House.)
We make use of the official list of CTH majors and minors that comes to us periodically via PeopleSoft. We send information out regularly via email lists for CTH students and faculty.

Catholic Studies has also organized a number of non-academic events in part to enhance its visibility: a Lenten bible study (winter 2005; winter 2006), a faculty retreat (fall 2004; spring 2006), the convocation with Cardinal George and bishop Imesch (winter 2003, winter 2005, spring 2006). The office sends Christmas cards each December to faculty, administrators, and staff, as well as to collaborators outside the university.

For spring 2006 we are planning the first annual Catholic seniors’ banquet. This event will bring together students and their families, as well as the CTH faculty. This banquet will showcase seniors majoring and minoring in Catholic Studies, but also offer all graduating seniors who are Catholic the opportunity to use Catholic language to express the meaning of their college experience. The first annual Catholic Studies medal will be awarded at this banquet for the best essay in Catholic Studies. Advertising this banquet and the medal should serve to raise the program’s visibility a bit further.